

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2036

EXDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, IS

SUBJ: SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER AFFIRMS SARG TO PURSUE

PEACEFUL SOLUTION

1. SUMMARY: ON SEPTEMBER 17 FONMIN KHADDAM AFFIRMED TO AMBASSADOR SARG'S INTENT REMAIN PATIENT AND PURSUE POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. SAID SYRIA WILL NOT BE PROVOKED INTO WAR BY ISRAELI STATEMENTS, WAR MANEUVERS OR OTHER TACTICS. SYRIA IS CONFIDENT THAT ISRAEL HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO WITHDRAW TO 1967 BORDERS. FONMIN STATED THIS CONFIDENCE IN PART BASED ON ANALYSIS OF SHIFTS IN U.S. PUBLIC OPINION FAVORABLE TO ARABS AND COMMITMENTS BY PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY TO PURSUE PEACEFUL SOLUTION. END SUMMARY.

2. AT THE END OF MEETING SEPTEMBER 17 REQUESTED BY AMBASSADOR TO DISCUSS SYRIA'S REQUESTS FOR U.S. BILATERAL ASSISTANCE, FONMIN KHADDAM TOOK OCCASION TO EXPRESS SARG'S VIEW THAT PROVIDED PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY REMAINED "FAITHFUL
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TO THEIR COMMITMENTS TO THE ARABS," SYRIA WOULD REMAIN

CONSTANT IN PURSUIT OF A PEACEFUL SOLUTION
THROUGH POLITICAL MEANS.

3. KHADDAM INDULGED IN NORMAL AMOUNT OF POSTURING THAT ARABS COULD NOT UNDERSTAND HOW GREAT POWER LIKE U.S. COULD IGNORE ITS INTERESTS IN ARAB WORLD AND KEEP ON SPOILING ISRAEL. MORE PROMINENT THEME IN PRESENTATION WAS THAT HE SAW A BASIC, THOROUGHGOING CHANGE IN U.S. POLICY TOWARDS THE NEAR EAST. HE ACKNOWLEDGED ARABS MUST PLAY THEIR PART IN ASSISTING THIS PROCESS BY NOT FALLING INTO THEIR OLD HABITS IN TERMS PROPAGANDA AND RHETORIC.

4. KHADDAM VOLUNTEERED HE HAD BEEN MOST IMPRESSED DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO WASHINGTON AT "HOW GOOD HEARTED THE ORDINARY AMERICAN CITIZEN IS."

5. NEVER ONE TO REACH FOR A SUBTLE TURN OF PHRASE, FONMIN DECRIED ISRAELI STATEMENTS OF RECENT WEEKS RE GOLAN AS HIGHLY PROVOCATIVE ADDING "NO PRIME MINISTER IN THE WORLD WOULD MAKE SUCH STATEMENTS UNLESS HE WAS EITHER A MADMAN OR A WARMONGER." NONETHELESS KHADDAM ASSERTED, ASSUMING CONTINUING US POLITICAL EFFORTS ALONG LINES ENUNCIATED BY SECRETARY AND PRESIDENT, SYRIA HAS DECIDED "TO KEEP ON WITH THE POLITICAL EFFORTS TO THE LAST CENTIMETER. WE SHALL EXHAUST ALL EFFORTS AND RABIN WILL WITHDRAW. HE WILL WITHDRAW FROM MORE THAN GOLAN; HE WILL WITHDRAW FROM JERUSALEM AND IT WILL BE RABIN WHO WILL SIGN THIS AGREEMENT." SYRIANS ARE OPTIMISTIC AND SARG WILL BE PATIENT BECAUSE "THE FUTURE IS FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE IS NOT MEASURED IN ONE OR TWO YEARS."

6. WAR, FONMIN CONTINUED, WOULD BE NEITHER IN THE INTERESTS OF THE ARABS, THE REGION, NOR WORLD PEACE. AMBASSADOR OBSERVED THAT ANOTHER WAR WOULD SERIOUSLY DAMAGE US EFFORTS TO DEVELOP CLOSER TIES WITH THE ARABS. WHETHER THIS WAS A RENEWED WAR OF ATTRITION OR A MORE GENERAL CONFLICT WAR WOULD TEND POLARIZE SITUATION AND PLACE US IN OPPOSITION TO ARABS. KHADDAM ANSWERED SYRIA APPRECIATES THAT AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION HAS SHIFTED TOWARDS A SIGNIFICANTLY MORE BALANCED VIEW OF THE ARAB/ISRAELI
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CONFLICT. THIS SHIFT ALSO PROMPTS DAMASCUS TO BE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS OF CURRENT POLITICAL EFFORTS AND IS FURTHER GROUNDS FOR ITS DECISION TO SEE THESE EFFORTS CONTINUE.

7. PROBING FOR DEGREE HIS UNDERSTANDING OF AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION, I SAID I HOPED HE UNDER NO MISCONCEPTION ABOUT AMERICAN COMMITMENT TO THE PRESERVATION OF THE STATE OF

ISRAEL. HE REPLIED, "WE ARE NOT RED INDIAN SAVAGES.
ARABS HAVE A CIVILIZATION OLDER AND DEEPER THAN ALL OTHERS (SIC)."

8. COMMENT: I HESITATE TO READ OVERLY MUCH INTO FORE-
GOING COMMENTS. KHADDAM'S WORDS, HOWEVER, DO ECHO THOSE
OF PRESIDENT ASAD TO ME OF LAST WEEK ABOUT SARG'S DETER-
MINATION TO AVOID BEING PROVOKED INTO WAR AND COMING FROM
FONMIN WHO IS CONSIDERED ONE OF SYRIA'S HARDLINERS, I FIND
THEM GENERALLY REASSURING. THIS CAPITAL HAS ITS SHARE OF
WAR RUMORS AND UNSETTLING SIGNS SUCH AS A THREE DAY EXHAUSTION
OF GASOLINE STOCKS (WHICH ENDED TODAY)
WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT BE SIGNIFICANT IN TERMS OF THE ARMY'S
REQUIREMENTS. KHADDAM'S WORDS TAKEN AT FACE VALUE SUGGEST
THAT SYRIA'S LEADERSHIP DOES NOT CURRENTLY FEEL ITSELF
UNDER PRESSURE WHICH COULD PUSH IT INTO TRIGGERING A
BATTLEFIELD CONFRONTATION WITH ISRAEL. JUDGING BY ITS
TV, RADIO AND PRESS COVERAGE, INCLUDING DISTINCTLY MUTED
TREATMENT OF THE RABIN VISIT TO WASHINGTON, IT APPEARS TO
BE IN CONTROL OF ITS NERVES. I AM AS YET UNABLE TO TRANSLATE
FONMIN'S GENERAL PRONOUNCEMENTS INTO PREDICTIONS OF WHAT
SYRIA'S POLICY WILL BE ON SPECIFIC ISSUES SUCH AS THE UNDOF
MANDATE. NEVERTHELESS, IT DOES APPEAR THAT WITH KHADDAM
CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN THE CAIRO TALKS AND ON THE VERGE OF
MEETING WITH SECRETARY IN WASHINGTON, SYRIAN LEADERSHIP
IS CONSCIOUS OF THE NEED FOR PATIENCE AS POLITICAL
EFFORTS CONTINUE.
MURPHY

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